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ABSTRACT

By the year 2000, the minority teaching pool is projected to shrink to five percent, although the minority population will increase to one third of school-age students nationally. To help persons entering teaching via alternate routes, Project ACT (Alternative Certification for Teachers), an accelerated alternative licensure program was developed. Project ACT is a year long "earn while you learn" program. The four major program components are: a self-paced module focusing on the foundations of American education; five weeks of preservice training in essential teaching skills; one academic year teaching, with beginning teacher salary, in a public school with monthly Saturday seminars at the university; and development of a portfolio to document teaching competency. The essential skills focus on: (1) the learners' social, cognitive, and physical development; (2) lesson development and instructional techniques and strategies; (3) learning theories; (4) children with exceptionalities and strategies for inclusion; (5) classroom organization and management; and (6) assessment and evaluation. Project ACT candidates are employed as alternative route teachers in public schools and are supervised by local mentors and university faculty. Of the 43 candidates that have completed the program and entered the teaching workforce, 16 (37 percent) are minorities. (ND)

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of preparing minority teachers has been well established and widely acknowledged. However, the number of minority teachers steadily declines while the number of minority students increases. Nationally, the percentage of minority employees in education has dropped from 13% in 1976 to 10% in 1993. By the year 2000, the minority teaching pool is projected to shrink to five percent, although the minority population will increase to one third of school-age students nationally (NEA, 1995). This paper reports the ongoing success of Project ACT, an accelerated alternative licensure program to provide mature adults for public school classrooms. More than one-third of these adults have been African-Americans, a percentage three times higher than traditional teacher preparation programs.

The state of North Carolina reflects the national trends, both in the decline of minority educators for the classrooms and the increased acceptance of teachers entering the public schools via alternative routes. North Carolina established its alternative certification program in 1985. At that time less than one-half of one percent of the new teachers hired in the state were via this route. By 1993, 9.2% of the new teachers entered the profession in this manner and by 1995 the percentage had reached almost 12%. A team of faculty members, who were committed to the concept that mature adults who are changing careers and want to teach could benefit from accelerated training, began developing an alternative teacher preparation program. This faculty team designed Project ACT (Alternative Certification for Teachers), a year long "earn while you learn" program, the keystone of which is a five week component of "essential teaching skills".

PROJECT ACT

Project ACT requires participants to attend classes in the summer from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. everyday for five weeks. This has been an enticement to minorities, and adult populations as a whole, because it requires that one be unemployed for a much shorter time than the traditional teacher preparation program. Because these candidates are mature adults, usually hold degrees in disciplines where there are teacher shortages, and have had five weeks of essential skills preparation, they are readily employed by school systems via alternative certification.

Project ACT is a 12-month development experience of four major components:

(1) a self-paced module focusing on the foundations of American education plus an overview of public education today,

(2) five weeks of preservice training in the "essential skills of teaching",

(3) one academic year teaching, with beginning teacher salary, in a public school with monthly Saturday seminars at the university, and

(4) the development of a portfolio to present evidence of competence as a teacher.

The five weeks essential skills component includes six major topics taught by six different instructors.

a. the learners' social, cognitive, and physical development,
b. lesson development and instructional techniques and strategies,
c. learning theories,
d. children with exceptionalities and strategies for inclusion,

e. classroom organization and management, and
f. assessment and evaluation.

Also included during the five weeks, are:

- videotaping of each participant teaching a lesson,
- completion of a unit keyed to a subject and grade appropriate textbook,
- beginning of the portfolio, and
- interaction with public school teachers in the specific area in each Project ACT participant will be teaching.

In addition, the Project ACT participants go through a two day Simulated Opening of School (SOS) at the end of their five weeks.

Project ACT candidates are employed as alternative route teachers in public schools and are supervised by local mentors and university faculty. The monthly seminars throughout the year build upon the knowledge and skills learned during the summer and the reflections that novice teachers have about their teaching experiences. The seminars also serve as a support group meeting for the Project ACT participants.

PROJECT ACT DATA

Project ACT only accepts candidates who will teach in areas of scarcity which include mathematics, science, business and vocational education, music, art, dance, drama, special education, foreign languages, and middle grades. Males who opt to teach at the elementary level also are accepted into the program. All candidates must submit a written application and they must present a transcript from a regionally accredited college or university that reports a completed degree and grade point average in excess of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale. Those selected from the first screening are interviewed. Table 1 reports the candidate pool throughout the process.

Table 1: Project ACT Applicants, Completers, and Afro-American Completers for 1994-1996

	Applied	Interviewed	Accepted	Completed	Afro-American
Cadre I	42	21	16	12	5
Cadre II	46	21	17	13	5
Cadre III	51	28	21	18	6

The decrease in numbers from those that applied and those interviewed is primarily a result of having low grade point averages or not being interested in teaching in an area of scarcity. The reduction in number interviewed and number accepted is attributed, primarily, to two reasons: a candidate's choice not (7) and judgment

of the interviewers that candidate personalities did not appear compatible with public school student needs (9). The eleven that dropped out of the program during the five weeks were either not fulfilling expectations of the program (4) or decided themselves that teaching was not for them (7). Of the 43 candidates that completed the program and entered the teaching workforce, 16 or 37% of them were minorities. Presently, all but two of the minority participants, are still teaching. These candidates did not successfully pass the specialty area of the PRAXIS II (National Teachers Exam) but continue to study with hopes that they may soon pass the exam and return to the classroom. Three non-minority participants have left the classroom because teaching required too much time/work with too little reward.

Demographic data concerning the Project ACT participants who completed the program is reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Age and Education

		I & II	III
AGE:	21 - 25		1
	26 - 30	4	2
	31 - 35	5	1
	36 - 40	7	4
	41 - 45	4	7
	46 - 50	4	1
	51 - 55	1	2
EDUC:	Bachelors	25	18
	Masters	9	4
	Post Masters	5	

SUMMARY

Alternative routes to licensing teachers are, and will continue to be, a viable procedure for staffing our public school classrooms. As more mature individuals seek to change careers, more efficient preparation programs need to be developed, implemented, and evaluated. Project ACT appears to be an accelerated program that works. A longevity study is underway to track the attrition rate of these mature teachers who are entering the profession in alternative programs.

Alternative routes into teaching also appear to attract more minority candidates than traditional programs, both nationally and in North Carolina. If data continue to show this trend, then accelerated alternative programs will provide a significant pool of minority teachers.